How to Write Academically – an Abridged Version of
They Say, I Say, by Graff & Birkenstein (2010)

This handout is adapted from They Say, I Say (2010) by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. Please note that “X” refers to the author’s name.

Is it cheating to use templates like this one to learn how to write academically? According to the authors, “it is not plagiarism to recycle conventionally used formulas” (p. 13). Use these formulas to help you write more academically.

Describing an article or book you’ve read

Summarizing an author’s thoughts in your writing:
- X argues that _____.
- X observes that _____.
- X refutes the claim that _____.
- X suggests that _____.
- X questions whether _____.
- X acknowledges that _____.

Introducing something implied:
- One implication of X’s treatment of _____ is that _____.
- Although X does not say so directly, she seems to imply that _____.

Using quotations in your writing

Hint: Don’t drop a quotation into your writing; be sure to introduce it and explain its importance to the reader.

Introducing quotations in your writing:
- X states, “_____.”
- According to X, “_____.”
- In X’s view, “_____.”

Explaining quotations in your writing:
- X’s point is that _____.
- In other words, X believes _____.
- The essence of X’s argument is that _____.

Discussing the claims of articles

Describing an article’s claim:
- X’s claim that _____ rests upon the assumption that _____.
- X’s theory of _____ is useful because it creates insight on the difficult problem of _____.

Describing multiple articles at once:
- A number of studies have recently suggested that _____.
- In their recent work, X and Y have offered descriptions of _____.
- According to both X and Y, _____.

They Say, I Say, is by Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein. The above templates were either taken from or adapted from the 2nd edition, pages 221-231, published in 2010 by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, New York. Abridged by Laurie Waye, TWC, University of Victoria, 2011. This copy is made solely for the use by a student, staff, or faculty member for private study. Any other use may be an infringement of copyright if done without securing the permission of the copyright owner.
Describing an ongoing debate in the literature:
- In discussions of ______, one controversial issue is ______. On the one hand, X argues _____.
  On the other hand, Y contends _____.
- When it comes to the topic of _____, most researchers agree that ______. Where this agreement ends, however, is on the question of ______.

Describing why your research is important
Hint: Imagine your audience is asking you “So what?” They’re not asking to be mean; they’re asking so they can clearly know the point of what you’re writing.

Introducing gaps in the existing research:
- Studies of ______ have indicated ______. It is not clear, however, that this conclusion applies to ______.
- While X’s work informs us about _____, it is unknown if the same findings can be expected in the local environment.

Establishing why your claims or arguments are important:
- This topic matters because ______.
- These findings have important consequences for the broader domain of ______.
- These conclusions will have significant applications in ______ as well as in ______.
- Although ______ may appear trivial, it is in fact crucial in terms of concerns over ______.

Predicting readers’ criticism
Hint: Your argument will be much stronger if you directly address opposing points of view.

Making concessions while standing your ground
- Although I grant ______, I still maintain that ______.
- While it is true that ______, it does not necessarily follow that ______.

Addressing criticisms
- Some readers may challenge the view that ______, but ______.
- Postmodern feminists would certainly take issue with the argument that ______. However, ______.

Talking about your research findings
Hint: Verbs like “may show,” “could demonstrate” and “might mean” give the reader the impression you aren’t sure of your analysis. If you’re sure, show it.
- Our data are consistent with X’s hypothesis that _____.
- These findings challenge the work of earlier researchers, who tended to assume that _____.
- One explanation of our finding of ______ is that ______. An alternative explanation is _____.